

# 8

## Lesson Eight

### FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author artfully builds a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and inform character development. The timing of events, from beginning, to middle, to end, can make a novel predictable or riveting. A plot, propelled by a crisis, will reach a climax, and close with a resolution (sometimes called *dénouement*). Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy time while telling the story. A successful author will keep a reader entranced by clever pacing built within the tale, sometimes confounding a simple plot by telling stories within stories.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan makes deliberate choices about how to structure and pace events while exploring how tradition, fate, memory, and change define the human condition. In this lesson, map the events of the narrative to assess the artistry of the storytelling.

There are many turning points in *The Joy Luck Club*, but they do not always happen in the order we read them. Suyuan Woo leaves her babies on the road to Chungking. Lindo Jong escapes a dubious marriage. Rose Hsu Jordan learns to stand up to her husband. Ying-ying St. Clair aborts a child out of vengeance. And June Woo will go back to China to meet her sisters and discover the part of her that is truly Chinese.



### Discussion Activities

Use the homework assignment from the last lesson to have students present the most important turning points in the novel. Ask them to refer to key passages from the story, explaining why these events are the most significant. Use this information for the next activity.

In small groups, have students map a time line that depicts the development of the story and the building of drama. This time line should include the most significant turning points, but also examine lesser events that build tension. As students develop their time lines, they should define what they perceive to be the beginning, middle, and the end of the novel. Groups should present their time lines to the class.



### Writing Exercise

The novel is comprised of a series of self-contained stories. How does Tan integrate these varied stories? What devices does she use? Does the use of multiple narrators fail in any way? If so, how? If not, why not?



### Homework

Have students finish the novel. Ask them to consider what are the most important forces guiding the lives of the characters.